



ROBIN SMITH
down to the
bare facts
with
MARTIN
TURNER

WISHBONE ASH fan displays his tattoo.

ALL BOOTS AND CASSOCKS

MARTIN TURNER couldn't have chosen a better place to commit suicide.

He was at the home of a gun collector friend and had a whole arsenal of firearms to choose from. Fortunately, he decided to get a refund on his one way ticket to that great gig in the sky, where PA's are perfect and the crowds are all dressed in white. He picked up a Bible and calmed himself down.

"Let us say that I'd ruined some relationships," says Wishbone's bass player. "Everything seemed to be getting too much and I was ruining three people's lives. I was crying and not sleeping properly and when I found myself at my friend's house I thought about ending it all.

"I guess I was blinded to reason but then I saw a bible lying nearby. As corny as this might sound there are passages in the Book which give you an uplift when times are hard and your brain is confused."

This experience furnished Wishbone with a song 'Baby The Angels Are Here' from their last album 'No Smoke Without Fire.' You'll find many a ponderous line running through their work and Martin reckons he's something of a psychic. Mulling over late night coffee and sandwiches at a plush (ha ha) Bradford hotel, he recalls one memorable incident involving his grandmother.

"I had a feeling she was going to pass away because the sparkle passed out of her eyes," he says. "On the night she died I had this uncanny feeling that she was with me. I woke up and felt that she was there — she'd always said that when she did die she'd touch all of us with her presence. My father told me that he had a similar experience of her being with him."

Martin comes from a close knit family in Torquay. Back when he first started plunking a guitar his father was coerced into driving him to gigs. He also had a talent for chatting up girls and introducing them to his son.

Wishbone can really trace their roots back to a small column ad in a newspaper. Martin and drummer Steve Upton advertised for a guitarist and up jumped Andy Powell. They advertised for a second guitarist and along came Ted Turner, later to be replaced by Laurie Wisefield.

This year sees Wishbone's tenth anniversary. In my humble estimation they were the band who originated duelling twin guitars and smooth but adventurous gritty melodies imitated by a host of other bands ever since, from Boston to Thin Lizzy.

"Actually we've received very little credit for it," continues Martin. "But a hell of a lot of bands today owe their formula to dear old Wishbone."

"I once met a guy from a band in a lift carrying a pile of our albums. He said he was going to listen to them and see what he could steal. Bands who are bigger household names than Wishbone Ash have definitely benefited from us."

Of course that's always been the thing about Wishbone, they've always been accused of being somewhat anonymous. Not for these chirpy lads the roar of sensational headlines.

"Sure we could have changed into our tight leather trousers and boasted of how many women we've had," says Martin. "But we share enough of our lives with the public when we're on stage."

"After Argus when we seemed to be the darlings of the press we could have turned out a second and third album along the same lines, but that would have been so damn boring. Instead we sat down and came up with 'Wishbone Four' which from the the press' point of view was a big mistake. We've never been in since then. That doesn't worry me particularly, I just wish that some of those gentlemen would actually come and see our concerts before choosing to ignore us."

Still, the band don't exactly have to worry financially. Martin lives in a nice little place in East Cheam where one room is converted into a music studio. The rest of the band have equally comfortable residences and Laurie's is soon going to be up for sale for a cool £60,000. What's led to the great success formula?

"In the early days we were unique," says Martin modestly. "We were brightening the gloom of those post flower power days. Then again we sounded so distinctly British, we were an extremely good export. People also appreciated the fact that although we lost Ted and thought of splitting up, we weathered the storm and came up smiling with Laurie."

"Ted left the band with his girlfriend to try and find an obscure monastery in Peru, or something. He's still living off his royalties and he's been playing with a friend of his. I wish he would do something more, then I'd have a lot more to say when people ask me about him. Despite the fact that he's been gone so long it's good to know people are still interested in him."

The small hours are quickly getting nearer and Andy displays an acoustic guitar which has been given to him by an admiring fan. Some fans are even more fervent in their love of the band. They know one who has Wishbone Ash lovingly tattooed right across his back. And that's not all, he also has various album titles scrawled down his arms.

The coach taking us back to London turns up at 10 prompt the following morning. It's a racey little number Wishbone are hiring for the entire tour.

Andy hunches over a video game in yet another attempt to beat the score, set I believe by Upton. Martin sits back and starts to become reflective yet again.

"On our latest album 'Just Testing' we've discovered the songwriting talents of Claire Hammill who's in great sympathy with what we're trying to do. I see each of our albums as a continuing chapter in our story each with its different surprising character."

"I reckon Wishbone is good for many years yet. I never get bored that's just a bad state of mind to be in. Even when I was a kid and I was conscripted into the school choir I used to have fun by wearing jeans and cowboy boots under my cassock."

Albums available:

Wishbone Ash (MCA MCG 3507)
Pilgrimage (MCA MCG 3504)
Argus (MCA MCG 3501)
Wishbone Four (MCA MCG 3503)
Live Dates (MCA MCSP 254)
There's The Rub (MCA MCF 2585)
Locked In (MCA MCF 2750)
New England (MCA MCG 3523)
Classic Ash (MCA MCF 2795)
Front Page News (MCA MCG 3524)
No Smoke Without Fire (MCA MCG 3528)
Jest Testing (MCA MCF 3052)